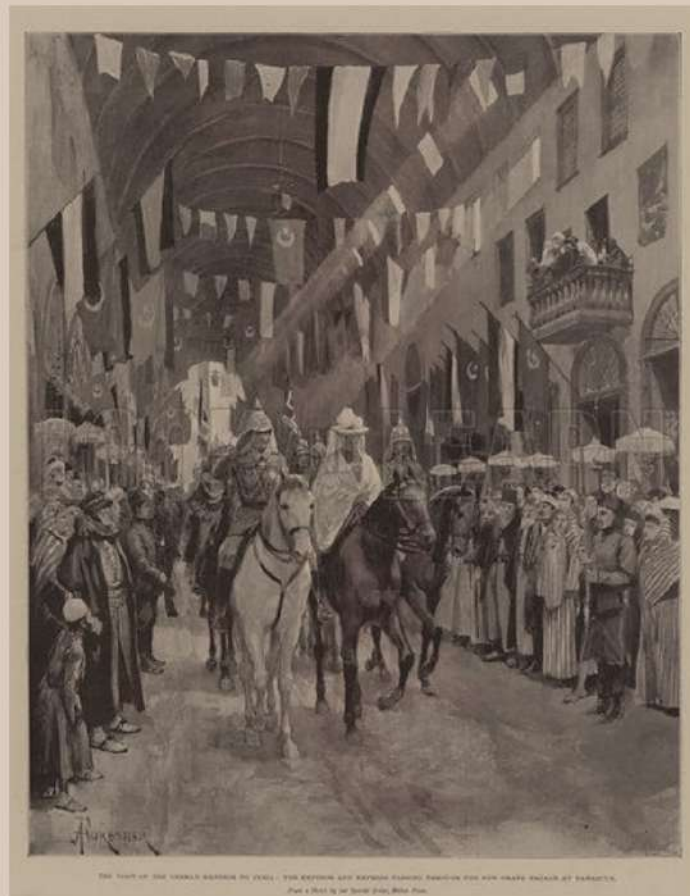


A brief look at the relations of the Germans with the Levant till the outbreak of World War II



By
Said Ibrahim Kreidieh

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THE VISIT OF THE OTTOMAN EMPEROR TO SYRIA: THE EMPEROR AND EMPRESS PASSING THROUGH THE NEW GRAND BAZAAR AT DAMASCUS.
Photo & Sketch by our Special Artist, Berlin, Prussia.

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Cover page:

The Visit of the German Emperor to Syria, the Emperor and Empress
passing through the New Grand Bazaar at Damascus in 1898. Illustration for
The Illustrated London News, 26 November 1898.

Introduction

In modern times several European powers competed in extending their hegemony and protecting their interests in the Levant. Germany was almost outside this Levantine game. In fact, Germany did not become an important power in Europe until 1871 when all the German states united under the auspices of Prussia to form the German Empire with Berlin its capital. From that date until the end of the Second World War Germany had much fewer interests and ambitions in the Levant in comparison with other European powers such as France, Britain and Russia.

Germany “had no traditional connexions [sic] with Syria, stood close to no community in it, had no Muslim subjects, and was a newcomer to the Eastern world.”¹ In general, during the 19th century Germany, like the Ottoman Empire, had “an interest in stymieing the advance of other powers in the Near East, and by the end of that century a number of influential German foreign policy thinkers had become intrigued by the potential of Pan-Islam as a revolutionary force to blow up the empires of Russian, British and French rivals.”²

Being a Levantine and particularly Lebanese, I intended to expose in this work a concise study about German relations with the Levant in many domains till the outbreak of World War II, a period in which the people of these two geographic entities witnessed changes and alterations in their political and socio-economic conditions.

¹ Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate* (Beirut: Librarie du Liban, 1958), p. 40.

² Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering empires: the clash and collapse of the Ottoman and Russian empires, 1908-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 26.

Although this topic needs an endeavor of writing volumes of books and works to cover it, which is really very few especially in the Arab World, yet I took the initiative to add a mile in this long historical journey hoping that future will produce more studies and researches about this topic.

Said I. Kreidieh

Beirut - Lebanon

Where is the Levant

Although the term “Levant” has no explicit definition in the geographical sense, it has been reiterated by European diplomats. One of these definitions states that it is “a name applied to the countries along the E[astern] shore of the Mediterranean and including all the bordering countries i.e. Greece, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Egypt. In a more restricted sense it refers only to the non-European coastlands. The parts of the former Fr[ench] mandate over Syria and Lebanon were called Levant States”.³ Another definition indicates that the Levant, “(from the French lever), “to rise,” as in sunrise, meaning the east), historically, is the region along the eastern Mediterranean shores, roughly corresponding to Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria. The name Levant States was given to the French mandate of Syria and Lebanon after World War I, and the term is sometimes still used for those two countries, which became independent in 1946”.⁴

Based on these definitions the term “Levant” will be used in the following lines to refer to Syria and Lebanon which were part of the French Mandate and became independent in 1946.

The Germans and the Levant before the Unification of Germany

Prior to the German unification of 1871, and due to their political fragmentation into several states, the Germans did not play an

³ Leon E. Seltzer, *The Columbia Lippincott gazetteer of the world* (Morningside Heights, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1952), p. 1046.

⁴ "Levant". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 20 Jul. 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Levant>. Accessed 23 May 2022.

influential political role in the Middle East until the forties of the 19th century. However, they had obvious activities in some religious, educational, commercial and health fields.



The early presence of the Germans in the Levant could be traced back to the Crusades. The Germans had Biblical interests in the two Lebanese cities of Sidon and Tyre. Accordingly, the German Branch of Order of the Knights of St. John (*Johanniter Orden*) possessed some properties there. On the other hand, some German studies and reports were issued describing the conditions of the Crusaders mainly in the County of Tripoli and in the Levant in general and depicting the relation of its Christian population with the West mainly the Maronites.⁵

During the middle of the 19th century, the Germans' interests in the Ottoman Levant⁶ started to shift from religious frameworks to the field of education. German schools were opened in Aleppo, Beirut, Sidon, and Mount Lebanon to promote the German culture and language as well as to undermine the French cultural influence in the region. Nevertheless, France's hegemony over culture and education remained prominent over there.

In the commercial field, some German states had established ties with the Levant since the Middle Ages. The export-import operations were carried out through traditional trade land routes and via European ports on the Mediterranean Sea such as Marseille and Trieste. Between 1718 and 1840 Prussia and other German states signed commercial agreements with the Ottoman Empire but the outcome was not successful as expected due to the weaknesses of the German commercial role in the Levant besides the absence of sea lines between the Levant and the German coasts.⁷ This situation

⁵ Abdul Raouf Sinno, *Almanya wa al Islam fi al qarnayn al tasei ashar wa al ishrin* [Germany and Islam During the 19th & 20th Centuries] (Beirut: Al-Furat, 2007), p. 302.

⁶ The Levant became under Ottoman rule since 1516.

⁷ Abdul Raouf Sinno, *Al masaleh al Almaniya fi Surya wa Falastin, 1841-1901* [The German interests in Syria and Palestine, 1841-1901] (Beirut: Maahad al Inmaa al Arabi, 1978), p. 223.

lasted till the end of the 19th century when sea lines started shipping directly from Germany to the Levant.⁸



Prussian Deaconesses school in Beirut (early 20th century)

In addition to education and commerce, the Germans were interested in social welfare and health care. In 1860 the German religious body Kaiserswerther Deaconesses Association (*Kaiserswerther Diakonissen Verein*) built an Orphanage in *Mina Al Huson* area in

⁸ Anita Gilleo, *German activities and German Arab relations in the Fertile Crescent countries, with emphasis on the current century*, MA thesis, American University of Beirut, 1968, p. 26.

Beirut named *Zoar*⁹ *Waisenhaus*¹⁰ (Zoar Orphanage). In 1861 the *Johanniter Orden* established a hospital in Sidon, but it encountered problems caused by the decrease in the number of patients in addition to intramural quarrels between Druzes and Christians after opening the door to non-Christians. These developments besides competition from a newly inaugurated French hospital in the city urged the *Johanniter Orden* to move its hospital to Beirut after 13 months.¹¹

The hospital in Beirut was located near the Prussian consulate and other Prussian foundations, and hence it was known to the public by the *Prussian Hospital*, and later a pharmacy and a dispensary were added to its activities.¹² Between 1871 and 1917 the hospital's doctors were recruited from the professors of medicine at the Syrian Protestant College, which later became the American University of Beirut. Around the year 1900, eight deaconesses from *Kaiserswerth* supported by local nursing staff were responsible for the care of about 500 patients per year.¹³

On the other hand, Prussia was among the signatories of a series of international conventions known as the *Règlement Organique* ("Organic Regulation") ratified between 1860 and 1864 by the Ottoman Empire and major European Powers (Austria-Hungary, Britain, France, Prussia and Russia) in the aftermath of the 1860 communal strife between the Muslims and Christians in Mount

⁹ Meaning "A place of refuge; a sanctuary" derived from Hebrew name of one of five ancient cities in the Jordan valley, mentioned in the Bible in Genesis 19:22, 23, and 30 as the place whither Lot fled with his wife and two daughters to escape death when Yahweh destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah
[Source: <https://www.yourdictionary.com/zoar>]

¹⁰ Sinno, *Al masaleh al Almaniya fi Surya wa Falastin*, 1841-1901, p. 163.

¹¹ *ibid*, p. 174.

¹² Sinno, *Almanya wa al Islam fi al qarnayn al tasei ashar wa al ishrin*, p. 306.

¹³ Christian Kirchen, *Traces of Germany in Lebanon, the Johanniter hospital in Beirut*, <https://www.goethe.de/ins/lb/en/kul/sup/spu/20919610.html>.

Lebanon and Damascus. The *Règlement Organique* led to the creation of a political entity in Mount Lebanon known in Arabic as *Mutasarfiyya*.



The Germans and the Levant after the Unification of Germany

After their victory in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 and the completion of their unity in 1871, the Germans kept on their scant

interest in the Levant but they pursued a new strategy that focused on undermining and defying the French hegemony in this region and mainly in present-day Lebanon.¹⁴ This policy was adopted to impose compromises with Paris in any political settlement in Europe and overseas. To realize this approach, the German consul in Beirut paid an unexpected visit in 1871 to the Maronite Patriarch in Bkirki¹⁵ in an attempt to compete with France in protecting the Maronites. The French consul on the other hand viewed this visit as a violation of France's right in Mount Lebanon and regarded the Maronite feedback as cool and nonchalant. When the Franco-German relations deteriorated during the eighties of the 19th century, Germany sent its warships to the Levantine coast to inform the French indirectly that their interest in this region is related to their attitude towards Germany in Europe.¹⁶

Another facet of the German policy towards France in the Levant was the visit of the German Emperor Kaiser Wilhelm II to Syria and Palestine during the months of October and November 1898. "The Kaiser was among those fascinated with Islam, going so far to declare on his visit that the world's 300 million Muslims had in him an eternal friend."¹⁷ The Kaiser started his journey with Istanbul on 16 October 1898; then he sailed by yacht to Haifa on October 25. After visiting Jerusalem and Bethlehem, he went back to Jaffa to embark to Beirut. On November 5, he reached this city and was welcomed by the *Wali* (Governor) of Beirut and around 50.000 persons among them many students who had a holiday for this special event besides members of the German community and on the next day he visited the *Prussian Hospital*. In Beirut he was given

¹⁴ Sinno, *Al masaleh al Almaniya fi Surya wa Falastin*, 1841-1901, p. 272

¹⁵ A village in Keserwan area which was at that time part of the Mutasarifiyya of Mount Lebanon.

¹⁶ Sinno, *Almanya wa al Islam fi al qarnayn al tasei ashar wa al ishrin*, pp. 324 -325 & p. 336.

¹⁷ Reynolds, p. 26.

the title of “Hajj”¹⁸ by his friends and the Qabadayat¹⁹ of the port as a gratitude for the friendship he showed towards Muslims and for his visits to some mosques.²⁰

On November 7 he took the train passing the cities of Aley and Zahlé (both located in the *Mutasarifiyya* of Mount Lebanon) to reach Damascus.²¹ He stayed in Damascus till November 10 before moving to Baalbek. In Damascus, he visited its souks and historic monuments including the tomb of Saladin.²² In Baalbek he stayed one night and was impressed by the relics and antiquities of the city, and upon his return to Germany, he sent an excavation mission to search for more relics in the city besides the inscriptions and the rock reliefs carved into the limestone rocks around the estuary of the *Nahr al-Kalb* (Dog River) north of Beirut.²³ The sojourn at Baalbek was the last station of the Emperor’s journey. Thereafter, he left for Beirut. On Saturday, November 12, he returned from there on board his ship to his home country.

¹⁸ A Muslim title given to any person who performs Pilgrimage to Mecca.

¹⁹ Qabadayat plural of Qabaday which is a Turkish word that mean valiant. But in Beirut it meant the valiant man who often help people in their community and resolves local disputes peacefully [Source: *Beirut’s “Qabadayat”*,

<https://languagewave.com/2020/04/02/episode-19-beiruts-qabadayat-valiant-men/>

²⁰ Iskandar Riyashi, *Qabl wa Baad wa Ruasa Lubnan kama araftahum* [Before and after and Lebanese presidents as I knew them], introduction by Usama Ajaj Al-Muhtar (Beirut: Al-Furat, 2006), p. 259.

²¹ Abdul Raouf Sinno, *The Visit of the German Emperor William II to the East 1898 as Reflected in Contemporary Arab Journalism*, https://www.academia.edu/39600903/Abdel_Raouf_Sinno_The_Visit_of_the_German_Emperor_William_II_to_the_East_1898_as_Reflected_in_Contemporary_Arab_Journalism, pp. 13-14.

²² Known in Arabic as *Salah Al-Din Al-Ayyoubi* صلاح الدين الأيوبي, a Muslim leader who became the first sultan of both Egypt and Syria, and was the founder of the Ayyubid dynasty, he led the Muslim military campaign against the Crusader states in the Levant and defeated them at the decisive Battle of Hattin in 1187, and thereafter took control of Palestine—including the city of Jerusalem—from the Crusaders, who had conquered the area 88 years earlier.

²³ Sinno, *Almanya wa al Islam fi al qarnayn al tasei ashar wa al ishrin*, pp 330-331.

The French authorities did not look with satisfaction upon this visit and sought covertly to obstruct the journey. These intentions were leaked through German reports which disclosed French plans to assassinate the Emperor in Egypt or Palestine.²⁴ On the other hand the German consul in Beirut mentioned in a report dispatched to Berlin in September 1898 that the French will instigate the Maronites in Mount Lebanon to express their reluctance towards the Emperor's visit. The authenticity of this report was plausible as the Maronites in Keserwan and Metin areas disobeyed the orders of Naum Pasha, the *Mutasarif*,²⁵ and did not show any gesture of greetings to the Emperor in accordance with their loyalty to France.²⁶

In accordance with the approach of causing discomfort to France in the Levant, Germany supported plots drawn by Enver Pasha²⁷ and Talaat Pasha²⁸ to weaken the French influence in *Mutasarifiyya* of Mount Lebanon. This plot aimed at establishing a Khedivate²⁹ rule in Syria under Ottoman sovereignty headed by Yusuf İzzeddin Efendi the crown prince of the cousin of Sultan Muhammad V of

²⁴ *ibid*, p. 326.

²⁵ Means the ruler of the *Mutasarifiyya*.

²⁶ Lahad Khater, *Ahd al Mutasarifin fi Lubnan, 1861-1918* [Epoch of the Mutasarifs in Lebanon, 1861-1918] (Beirut: The Lebanese University, 1967), p. 156.

²⁷ Born on Nov. 22, 1881, in Istanbul and died on Aug. 4, 1922, near Baldzhuan, Turkistan [now in Tajikistan] Ottoman general and commander in chief, a hero of the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 against Sultan Abdul Hamid, and a leading member of the Ottoman government from 1913 to 1918, he married Najiya Sultan the niece of Sultan Abdul Hamid. [Source: "Enver Paşa", <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Enver-Paşa>].

²⁸ Born in 1874, Edirne, Ottoman Empire [now in Turkey]—died March 15, 1921, Berlin, leader of the Young Turks party [which was against Sultan Abdul Hamid], Ottoman statesman, grand vizier (1917–18), and leading member of the Ottoman government from 1913 to 1918. [Source:

"Talat-Paşa", <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Talat-Paşa>].

²⁹ An autonomous tributary state of the Ottoman Empire, established and ruled by the Muhammad Ali Dynasty of Egypt, the ruler of this state is called Khedive who is defined as: a viceroy of the sultan of Turkey (source: "Khedive", <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/khedive>).

the Ottoman Sultan (Rashad). In January 1914 the German Ambassador in Istanbul visited Enver Pasha and informed him that the German government supports entirely the “Khedivate plan” and realized that it is the best means to consolidate the dominance of the Ottomans in Arab land and to enhance their relationship with people of that region. He added that the German government is ready to assist the Ottoman Empire in fulfilling this project which will lead to the abolition of the international political privileges bestowed to the *Mutasarifiyya* of Mount Lebanon. Enver from his side replied that the project had been confidential and had not been discussed on an official basis.³⁰ Germany, from its side was interested in this project because it would replace the Anglo-French influence in the region with German supremacy. But the government in Berlin demanded that the *Mutasarifiyya* would be granted administrative independence by the Khedivate of Syria only in the domains of budget and the workflow of the employees.³¹ But the *Mutasarifiyya* project was not materialized due to the death of the crown prince³² and to the outbreak of the First World War with all its political repercussions and consequences.³³

Apart from the rivalry with France, the Germans had cultural interests in the Levant and these were manifested in publishing German research and studies about that region, especially in the fields of history, geography and heritage.³⁴ As for commerce, the early twentieth century brought the German flag to Levantine ports, followed by its commercial travelers, its banking and insurance

³⁰ Aziz Bek, *Surya wa Lubnan fi al-harb al-alamiya* [Syria and Lebanon during World War], translated into Arabic by Fuad Midani (Beirut: Al-Ahrar, 1932), pp 75-76.

³¹ *ibid*, p, 76.

³² Some stories mention that he committed suicide, others accuse Enver in assassinating him (Aziz Bek, p. 77).

³³ *ibid*, p. 77.

³⁴ Sinno, *Almanya wa al Islam fi al qarnayn al tasei ashar wa al ishrin*, pp 307-309.

companies, and its hotels.³⁵ Nearly all of the Great Powers of Europe along with the United States competed in the fields of education while Germany concentrated its attention on trade. In the majority of the commercial centers of the Levant, at the turn of the 20th German exports exceeded imports. Approximately 100 German firms established branches and depots in Aleppo, Beirut and Damascus supported by a large force of traveling salesmen who were dispatched by German firms to the Levant. Assisted by low prices, dependability in delivery and flexible conditions for payment and other practices less favorably looked by the French, the German business in the Levant increased substantially. In 1905 the *Atlas* line of Bremen established regular service to Beirut, and then others followed.³⁶

In the First World War, Ottoman Empire joined Germany, Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria in a coalition known as “Central Powers” against France, Britain, Russia, Italy, Japan, and the United States whose coalition was known as “Allies” or “Entente Powers”, accordingly the Levant was not an enemy territory for the government in Berlin. Consequently, Germany increased its influence by offering more support to its educational and commercial institutions in the Levant to encounter the hegemony of France, Britain and Russia. Germany even took a bolder attitude when its submarines sailed in 1915 along the Levantine coast and some of their sailors landed on the beaches and were welcomed by the German community. But this spectacular show provoked the enemies of Germany and the Ottoman Empire who retaliated by bombarding the Levantine coast.³⁷

³⁵ Longrigg, p. 40.

³⁶ Gilleo, pp. 25-26.

³⁷ Aziz Bek, pp. 123-124 & Sinno, *Almanya wa al Islam fi al qarnayn al tasei ashar wa al ishrin*, p. 333

On the other hand, the government in Berlin sought to approach Arab nationalists in the Levant by inviting them to visit Germany besides issuing and distributing publications in Arabic featuring Germany as a friendly country.³⁸ Furthermore; German propaganda spread via the German consulates in Syria and Palestine claiming that the emperor and his agents in the empire had become or about to become Muslims.³⁹ In accordance with the rapprochement policy with the Muslims, Emperor Wilhelm donated in June 1915 a chandelier to the tomb of Saladin in Damascus.⁴⁰

Moreover, the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent to Beirut in 1915 Max von Oppenheim who was the head of the *Nachrichtenstelle für den orient* (Orient News Agency) to activate the German propaganda and to get in touch with Arab nationalists for supporting Germany and the Ottoman Empire against France and Britain.⁴¹ Oppenheim with other German political strategists were studying plans for a possible *jihad* (Muslim holy war) to be turned into revolt against Britain and its allies and organized by German agents and conducted by leaders paid by Berlin or Istanbul.⁴²

To encounter the anti-Ottoman propaganda circulated by the Allies, the authorities in Istanbul had set up a news agency bureau to refute the rumors against the Ottoman Empire. This bureau opened branches in the Levant and Palestine but soon it turned into a German agency for espionage and propaganda run under the supervision of the German spy Karl Hübel.⁴³ By 1915 the Germans

³⁸ Sinno, *Almanya wa al Islam fi al qarnayn al tasei ashar wa al ishrin*, pp 332-333.

³⁹ Donald M. McKale, "Germany and the Arab Question in the First World War." *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 29, no. 2, Apr. 1993, p. 238. EBSCOhost, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263209308700946>.

⁴⁰ Aziz Bek, p 225.

⁴¹ Sinno, *Almanya wa al Islam fi al qarnayn al tasei ashar wa al ishrin*, p. 334-335.

⁴² C. L. Sulzberger, "German Preparations in the Middle East." *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 20, no. 4, 1942, p. 664, JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20029184>.

⁴³ Aziz Bek, p. 47.

established in August 1915 a “club” in central Beirut at Burj Square and named it *Muqtataf al-Akhbar* مقتطف الأخبار (News Extract). To disguise the espionage features, the Germans displayed inside the club newspapers and magazines and posted on its walls drawings relating to the emperors of Austria and Germany besides the Ottoman Sultan and military leaders of the Central Powers. The Germans entrusted the management of this club to Muhammad Effendi al-Rayyes, who was a pro-Ottoman Beirut personality, while the full responsibility of the club was entrusted by Karl Hübel. This club remained functioning till the end of the First World War.⁴⁴

At the beginning of 1917, the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent Curt Max Prüfer, an intelligence agent, to study local German propaganda, particularly in Syria and Palestine. Prüfer proposed that Germany should change the approach of its propaganda, which portrayed Germans as superior warriors and industrialists, and emphasize in return on their peace-loving nature and identification with Turkish culture. He urged halting the Pan-Islamic and military themes of German propaganda as well as stopping the dispatch of German language materials to the empire. To replace them, he suggested sending Turkish and Arabic translations of German novels, films, plays and other cultural materials. However; the idea of moderating German nationalism received little attention in Berlin. “The German War Ministry ordered that Syria be sent propaganda consisting of German for Arabs, German for Syrians, German school primers, German letter-writing manuals, commercial manuals.”⁴⁵

The German espionage activities were not steered exclusively towards the Allies, but managed to gather information about the situation in the Levant and to infiltrate into the Ottoman intelligence system by hiring Ottoman officers and soldiers. With this strategy

⁴⁴ ibdi, p. 292.

⁴⁵ McKale, pp. 244-245.

the Germans were able to recruit one of the escorts of Jamal Pasha who disclosed information about the Pasha's movements at work and even at home with his family.⁴⁶ The German authorities paid for this espionage project 100,000 Golden Marks per month to their spies and secret agencies who received the amount via *Deutsche Orientbank*.⁴⁷

Following the fiasco of the German-Ottoman attack on the Suez Canal in 1915 the British switched from defense to offense. On December 9, 1917 the British entered Jerusalem, while Arab forces headed by Emir Faisal I⁴⁸ and the British army took Damascus in October 1918. The remainder of Syria was occupied in two operations: the first a British column fought its way along the coastal region of the Levant through Tyre, Sidon, Beirut and Tripoli, and the second combined British-Arab forces moving in a parallel direction successively captured Homs, Hama and Aleppo.⁴⁹ On 30 October 1918 the Armistice of Mudros was signed ending hostilities in the Middle Eastern theater between the Ottoman Empire and the Allies of World War I. This military change enabled the British with their French and Arab allies to achieve decisive victories, and by the end of the war in 1918 all of Palestine, Iraq and the Levant became under their control.

With the defeat of the Central Powers and the withdrawal of the Ottomans from all the Arab lands, German interests and activities

⁴⁶ Aziz Bek, p. 291-292.

⁴⁷ *ibid*, p. 292.

⁴⁸ Faisal I, (Born on May 20, 1885, Mecca Saudi Arabia and died on September 8, 1933, Bern, Switzerland), Arab statesman and king of Iraq (1921–33) who was a leader in advancing Arab nationalism during and after World War I. [Source: Faisal I, King of Iraq, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Faisal-I>].

⁴⁹ George Lenczowski, *The Middle East in World Affairs*, 3rd. edition (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1962), p. 59.

became mostly inactive in the Levant which was henceforth turned into a French overseas territory.

As the Turkish rule in Arab lands ended, Faisal set up an Arab government in Damascus, under British protection, in Arab controlled Greater Syria (Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Transjordan). In May 1919, elections were held for the Syrian National Congress, which met the following month. On 7 March 1920, Faisal was proclaimed King of the Arab Kingdom of Syria (Greater Syria) by the Syrian National Congress government. In April 1920, the San Remo conference gave France the mandate⁵⁰ for Syria and Lebanon, which led to the Franco-Syrian War. The French were victorious in the Battle of Maysalun (near Damascus) on 24 July 1920, and Faisal was expelled from Syria.

In the Levant, henceforth the French mandate region was subdivided into six states based on religion: the state of Damascus (1920), Aleppo (1920), Alawites (1920), Jabal Druze (1921), the autonomous Sanjak⁵¹ of Alexandretta (1921), and the State of Greater Lebanon (1920), which became later the modern country of Lebanon.⁵²

The reason why France and not other country was rewarded the states of the Levant must be sought in the long historical association between France and these countries which began as early as the crusades.⁵³

On 28 June 1922, *Al-Itihad Al-Suri (The Syrian Federation)* was created compromising the states: of Damascus, Aleppo and the

⁵⁰ Mandate is an authorization granted by the League of Nations to a member nation to govern a former German or Ottoman territories. The territory was called a mandated territory, or mandate. [Source: "Mandate", <https://www.britannica.com/topic/mandate-League-of-Nations>].

⁵¹ A Turkish word means a subdivision of a vilayet

⁵² The Maronites were the majority at that time.

⁵³ Lenczowski, p. 309.

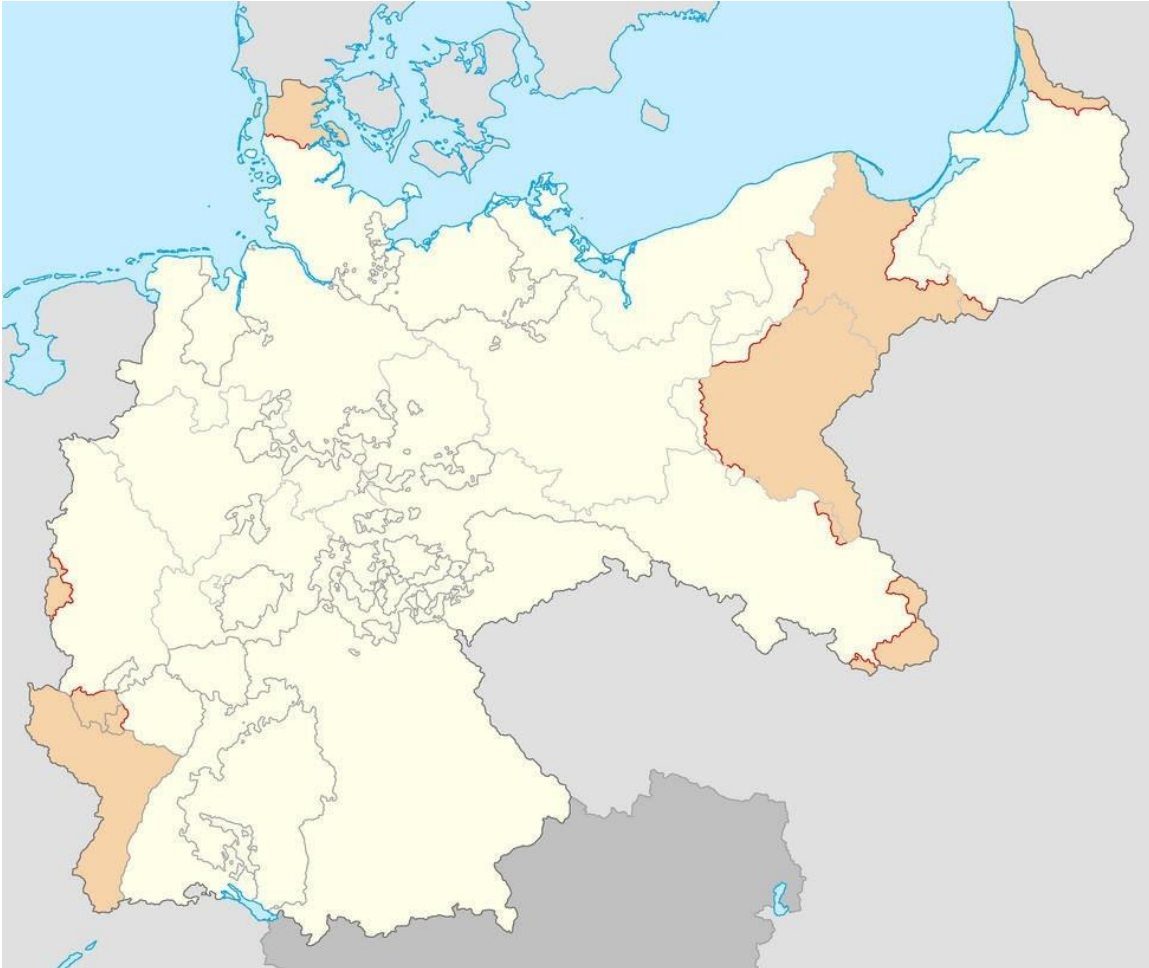
Alawite State. Jabal Druze and Greater Lebanon were not part of this federation. The autonomous Sanjak of Alexandretta was added to the state of Aleppo in 1923. The Alawite state seceded from the federation in 1924 and the states of Aleppo and Damascus were united into the State of Syria, with effect on 1 January 1925. On May 14, 1930, the State of Syria was declared the Republic of Syria and a new constitution was drafted. In 1936 Jabal Druze and the Alawite State joined this new republic. The Republic of Hatay (previously known as sanjak of Alexandretta) was founded in 1938 and in 1939 it became part of the Republic of Turkey. The British from their side applied the mandate system on their acquired share of the Arab lands which was Palestine, Transjordan and Iraq.

And thus a new political order was established in this area replacing the supremacy of Istanbul with that of London and Paris. All these changes including the introduction of the mandate took place without the consent and the share of the local the population who found themselves scattered among new political entities governed from Europe in new form of colonialism.

In Europe, Germany was exhausted in 1918 and sued for peace in desperate conditions, and on 28 June 1919 the Germans signed the peace treaty of Versailles which held Germany responsible for starting the war and imposed harsh penalties in terms of loss of territory, massive reparations payments and demilitarization. This was followed by internal unrest, the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II and the formal surrender to the Allies. A constitutional federal republic was proclaimed known as the Weimar Republic whose name is derived from the city of Weimar, which hosted the constituent assembly that established its government.

Berlin was still the capital but this new republic had profound changes in its boundaries and territories losing 13 percent of its

European territory (more than 27,000 square miles) and one-tenth of its population (between 6.5 and 7 million people).



Germany after the surrender, the lands in yellow represent the Weimar Republic while the brown are the lost territories.

Weimar Germany was in no position, politically, economically or militarily to challenge the new realities after 1918. In 1924, Gustave Stresemann, the German foreign minister said: “In foreign policy, we have hitherto pursued a narrow and limited course, and so perhaps we shall continue for a long while. We are going through the tribulations that must attend the policy of an unarmed nation.”⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Eric Sutton (ed), *Gustav Stresemann: his diaries, letters and papers* (London: Macmillan, 1935), v.1, p. 317.

Moreover; from 1924 Stresemann worked for rapprochement with Britain and France in an effort to revise peacefully most of the provisions of the Versailles peace settlement,⁵⁵ accordingly, the Weimar Republic did not engage in any tangible relations with the Levant, due to the restrictions of the Versailles Peace Treaty and to avoid any friction with France which occupied the area after the war.⁵⁶

After losing in the First World War, many Germans were dissatisfied with the new situation and they longed for a return to the Empire. In 1930, the global economic crisis hit. Germany could no longer pay the war debts stipulated in the Versailles Peace Treaty with the Allies. Millions of Germans lost their jobs and the country was in a political crisis as well. This discontent gave a boost to the rise of Nazism, and in 1933 Hitler was appointed chancellor and later he eliminated the Weimar republic and replaced it with the Third Reich,⁵⁷ turning Germany from democracy to authoritarianism.

Following these political changes and the economic and social crises in Germany which emerged by the end of World War I, the Germans had kept hardly any ties with the Near East, only 1800 Germans lived there,⁵⁸ while several Levantine student pursued studies at

⁵⁵ Francis R. Nicosia, *Nazi Germany and the Arab world* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 28.

⁵⁶ Hilal Thajil Jalewi & Raghd Faisal Abdul Wahab, "Al-asalib al-Diaeyah li Almanyah wa Italya fi al-Bilad al-Arabiyyah Ashiyat al-Harb al-alamiyah al-thaniya, dirasa wathaeqiya" [The propaganda methods of Germany and Italy in the Arab countries on the eve of World War II, a documentary study], *Majallat Adab Al-Basra*, no. 60, 2012, p. 161.

⁵⁷ Third Reich, official Nazi designation for the regime in Germany from January 1933 to May 1945, as the presumed successor of the medieval and early modern Holy Roman Empire of 800 to 1806 (the First Reich) and the German Empire of 1871 to 1918 (the Second Reich).

⁵⁸ Henry de Wailly, *Invasion Syria, 1941: Churchill and De Gaulle's forgotten war*, translated by William Land (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016), p. 69.

German universities in law, medicine, literature or history, these students were placed in a peculiar position.⁵⁹

On the other hand, France appointed in the Levant Henri Gouraud the first High Commissioner who was installed in Beirut. In 1923 he was succeeded by Maxime Weygand but for strictly political reasons he was replaced by Maurice Sarrail in 1924 who was a militant anticlerical unaware that in the Middle East religion is much more than a conviction it is the very source of one's identity.⁶⁰ In 1925 he provoked the Druze revolt which was a real war lasting several months. Artillery, aircraft and tanks were used. When the revolt reached Damascus he shelled the city and bloodily crushed the revolt. This attack prompted international outrage and condemnation and France's reputation and prestige were collapsed. Consequently, he was recalled to France on 30 October 1925 and was replaced by Henri de Jouvenel. During the period of his successor Henri Ponsot a relative state of calm prevailed in Levant. Damien de Martel who took over the high commissionership after Ponsot declared on March 1, 1936 the instruction of his government that a treaty between France and Syria on the model of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty would be concluded.⁶¹ And thus a Franco-Syrian treaty of independence and friendship was signed in 1936, assuring Syrian independence within a period of three years and was to be sponsored by France for membership in the League of Nations within the same period as well, besides conferring France the right to maintain two air bases no more than 40 km from major cities and to permit French land forces to stay in the Alawi and Druze regions for five years;

⁵⁹ Goetz Nordbruch, "Arab Students in Weimar Germany – Politics and Thought Beyond Borders", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 49, Issue 2, 2014, p. 275.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009413515533>

⁶⁰ De Wailly, p. xiv.

⁶¹ M. B. and H. G. L., "Syria and Lebanon: The States of the Levant under French Mandate", *Bulletin of International News*, Jul. 13, 1940, Vol. 17, No. 14, p. 848.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25642818>

moreover, French military instructors were to advise the Syrian army and France was to supply it with armaments and military equipment.⁶² The Syrian government immediately ratified the treaty, but this decision was not submitted for acceptance in the French Parliament (*Assemblée Nationale*) in Paris. Also, A Franco-Lebanese treaty of independence and friendship was signed in 1936 within three years besides assuring Lebanese entry to the League of Nations during the same period besides keeping French troops on Lebanese soil. Many Lebanese politicians did not consider these troops as an occupation force as long as the presence of military barracks and airports in Iraq, Syria and Egypt did not disrupt the independence of those countries.⁶³ The Lebanese Parliament approved the treaty but was not ratified by the French government. France refuse to ratify both treaties due to political changes in France and to a feeling of national security, France was reluctant to abandon her Syro-Lebanese base in the eastern Mediterranean while Europe was witnessing a resurgence of German and Italian militarism.⁶⁴ This French attitude made many Syrians and Lebanese realized eventually that France was an occupying power and that French Parliament like the French Army did not apply its mission as a mandatory power and considered the Levant a colony, and thus France according to them looked at Damascus and Beirut as part of its colonial empire in Africa and Asia.⁶⁵

As for the Nazi involvement in the Levant, the French authorities had noted since the late 1930s with concern the installation of dozens of German agents in the spread of German influence.

⁶² Ministry of Defense, Syrian Arab Republic, *Al-muahada al-Faransiya al-Suriya, 1936-1941* [Franco-Syrian Treaty, 1936-1941], [Source: <http://www.mod.gov.sy/index.php?node=554&cat=1169#>], and Lenczowski, p. 314.

⁶³ Bchara Khalil Al-Khoury, *Haqaea Lubnaniya* [Lebanese facts] (Beirut: Awarq Lubnaniya, 1960), v. 1, pp 202-204.

⁶⁴ Lenczowski, p. 316.

⁶⁵ De Wailly, pp. xiv-xv.

Equipped with fabricated passports and working undercover as exiled German Jews, tourists, journalists, or archaeologists, the agents who were linked to the *Abwehr* (German military intelligence), did not restrict themselves to the collection of information. Various French and British reports highlighted their role in organizing political opposition, smuggling weapons and sabotaging mostly British interests.⁶⁶ On the other hand, the Germans sent to Damascus in December Baldur von Schirach, the head of the Nazi youth for a mission relating to consolidating and organizing Arab youth.⁶⁷

On the other hand, on June 23, 1939, France and Turkey concluded a treaty of mutual assistance and an agreement signed in Ankara whereby France would cede to Turkey Hatay (the sanjak of Alexandretta) which enjoyed an autonomous situation within Syria. It is worth mentioning that Alexandretta has been always considered by the Syrians and Arab nationalists as an integral part of the Levant. This step was due to the need of France for Turkey's friendship to at a time the international situation had deteriorated and the prestige of the League of Nations was undermined.⁶⁸

All these measures and plans did not avoid neither France nor the world from a catastrophic ordeal that erupted a few days later, it was the breakout of the Second World War.

⁶⁶ Götz Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon: The Ambivalence of the German Option, 1933-1945* (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 92.

⁶⁷ Issac Lipschits, *La politique de la France au Levant, 1939-1941* (Paris: Edition Pedone, 1963), pp. 82-83.

⁶⁸ Majid Khadduri, "The Alexandretta Dispute." *The American Journal of International Law*, vol. 39, no. 3, 1945, p. 406. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2193522>.

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